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MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

ANNCR:

VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE WAKE OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR:

VOICE:

MORE THAN TWO WEEKS HAVE GONE BY SINCE THE TRUCE IN LEBANON WAS AGREED UPON, AND IT SEEMS TO BE HOLDING. THERE IS EVEN CAUTIOUS HOPE THAT THE COUNTRY MAY BE EMERGING FROM AN ERA OF CIVIL CONFLICT WHICH HAS EXTENDED OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS. IF THIS WERE TO HAPPEN, LEBANON COULD ONCE MORE ASSUME ITS ROLE AS COMMERCIAL CENTER OF THE MIDDLE EAST.

THE TRUCE, HOWEVER, IS PREDICATED ON A SETTLEMENT, AND IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE TERMS OF THAT SETTLEMENT WILL BE PERMANENTLY EFFECTIVE. THEY ARE EXPECTED TO BE ANNOUNCED SOMETIME THIS WEEK, AND TO PROVIDE FOR A RE-APPORTIONMENT OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS. IF THE RIVAL FACTIONS CAN LIVE WITH THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS -- AND THERE IS INCREASING BELIEF THAT THEY CAN -- THEN IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THE TRUCE WILL EVOLVE INTO A PERMANENT PEACE.

IT IS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, THAT LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE REMAIN UNIMPAIRED. THIS MEANS THAT A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION WILL BE FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE ROLE OF BOTH SYRIA AND THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION. IT WAS THROUGH THEIR INFLUENCE AND PRESSURE THAT THE TRUCE

WAS ARRIVED AT -- AFTER PALESTINIAN TROOPS HAD CROSSED INTO LEBANON FROM SYRIA TO TURN THE TIDE OF THE FIGHTING. SOME OBSERVERS -- PARTICULARLY IN ISRAEL -- HAVE ARGUED THAT SYRIA'S AIM IS TO REDUCE LEBANON TO LITTLE MORE THAN A SATELLITE, AND TO USE IT AS A BASE FOR INCREASED PALESTINIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL. HOWEVER, BOTH SYRIA AND THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION HAVE GIVEN ASSURANCES THAT THEY WILL FULLY RESPECT LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY. THE LATEST SUCH PLEDGE WAS CONTAINED IN A JOINT DECLARATION ISSUED SUNDAY AFTER A MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT FRANJIEH OF LEBANON AND PRESIDENT ASSAD OF SYRIA. THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS OF SYRIAN ASSURANCES THAT, ONCE STABILITY HAS BEEN RESTORED, THE TROOPS OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ARMY WILL BE RECALLED TO SYRIA.

THE FUTURE OF LEBANON IS ACTUALLY A SERIES OF QUESTION MARKS. WHAT WILL BE ITS FUTURE RELATION WITH SYRIA -- AND THE REST OF THE ARAB WORLD? HAS IT AT LAST FOUND A WORKABLE FORMULA WHICH WILL ENABLE IT TO SURVIVE AS A SOCIETY MADE UP OF TWO DIFFERING RELIGIOUS GROUPS? WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE PALESTINIAN ARABS -- AND WHAT KINDS OF CONTROLS ARE TO BE ESTABLISHED OVER THE GUERRILLA FORCES? AND WILL INTERNATIONAL INVESTORS HAVE ENOUGH FAITH IN THE LEBANESE SYSTEM TO REBUILD THEIR BUSINESSES THERE? THE ANSWERS TO SUCH QUESTIONS ARE OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE NOT ONLY TO THE FUTURE OF LEBANON BUT ALSO TO THE CAUSE OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. AND THE STRONGEST BASIS FOR OPTIMISM REMAINS, AS ALWAYS, THE INDISPUTABLE FACT THAT, FOR THE GREAT MAJORITY OF ALL THOSE CONCERNED, THERE IS NO PROFIT EITHER IN RENEWED CIVIL

CONFLICT IN LEBANON OR IN THE NEW AND WIDER MIDDLE EAST WAR TO WHICH THAT CONFLICT MIGHT LEAD.

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